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UNDER COLOR OF AUTHORITY:
JUSTIFYING VIOLENCE IN TELEVISION CRIME DRAMAS

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Dedication

To the Communication Studies professors at CSUN who taught me to
question my assumptions.

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ABSTRACT

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By

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Master of Arts in Communication Studies

The portrayal of violence is pervasive in contemporary American television programming. While a number of social scientific and psychology-based studies have been carried out to study how audiences react to fictional portrayals of violence, far fewer studies have addressed what portion of that violence is carried out by officers of the law—those acting under the color of authority—in television shows. This study employs content analysis to measure and analyze such violence across a range of contemporary television crime drama programs in order to identify the justification of violence performed by officials. This study begins the work of looking at the representation and justification of official violence in television dramas. Selected episodes of network crime dramas are viewed along with selected episodes of popular cable crime dramas. Incidents of violence by officials were quantified and compared to incidents of justified official violence to establish the numerical significance. An analysis of crime drama programming is used to answer two questions about justification of violence by official and non-

official characters. Through a content analysis of select episodes of fictional television crime dramas, two hypotheses about justification of violence by officials are tested and examined. This study finds that official violence is extensive in television drama and the majority of that violence is justified. Existing definitions of the term violence are reviewed and discussed in order to provide classification guidance for the analysis of the television program content. Scholars in media studies have explored aspects of violence in fictional portrayals on television for decades. This study contributes by offering future directions of research to perform additional investigations into the justification of official violence in American television dramas.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Who is Violent in Television Crime Dramas

Fictional television programs often portray police and other official authorities in ways meant to represent real authorities in society. Sometimes these fictional official authorities save lives, prevent violence or capture criminals and change individual lives, at the same time they put their lives on the line. These actions, intended to increase societal safety, can involve using threats of force and the performance of violence. Shows portray public officials who take violent actions in conflicting ways; sometimes violence by officials is praised, and sometimes is criticized. Television crime dramas offer a rich data source which can be analyzed in order to reach conclusions about the portrayal of violence and the justification of violence.

Television crime dramas offer models and blueprints for what justified and unjustified violence looks like. This study counts incidents of violence performed by officials and non-officials as well as instances of justification. Crime dramas provide a site permeated with multiple examples of violence. Crime dramas also often portray numerous officials who act to counteract or contain violence by others. As this study shows, officials often use violence in these shows and a majority of this violence is justified within the narrative. Crime dramas show shared understandings of violence and justification through portrayals of justified violence by officials and non-officials.

The term ‘television crime drama’ describes a popular genre of shows. Television genres serve producers and viewers as a tool to point out similarities between shows.¹

The identity of crime dramas has changed over the history of television. Generally televi-

¹ Jason Mittell, *Television and American Culture*. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010): 238.

sion crime dramas have a preoccupation in their narrative with criminal activity. The genre of crime drama in contemporary television programming has widened to include: police procedurals, medical procedurals, urban suspense and counter-terrorism shows. Each crime drama program has a different focus from other programs, and demonstrates the idea of television genres serving as loose guideposts, not strict formulas. While crime dramas vary in content, characterization, and plot arcs, they all are likely to contain high counts of violence.

These portrayals of justified violence partially reflect the values, assumptions, and beliefs of the U.S. public, while also representing the intentional framing by media producers.² Cultural artifacts, including fictional television programs, are a reflection and re-interpretation of cultural elements in the wider society.³ The portrayal of police and officials in crime dramas reflect social projections of the producers of the programs. Violent television dramas offer a view that violence is either justified or wrong and that the judgment of violence depends on the assigned status of the actors who perform the actions.

Television producers use the portrayal of violence by characters in a television drama to signal motivation, intention and justification. Crime dramas assign characters in the show the status of official authority or non-authority based on signs in the program. Shows show authorities having justification for violent actions they perform, and their

² One approach to television programming is that it serves to display cultural products and social facts, see Connie L. McNeely, "Perceptions of the criminal justice system: Television Imagery and Public Knowledge in the United States." *Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture* 3, no. 1 (1995): 1-20.

³ A current trend within explanations of culture is to view culture as continuing and changing through interaction and reinterpretation; television can be a reflection of the cultural ocean in which it is produced, see Jason Kaufman, "Endogenous Explanation in the Sociology of Culture." *Annual Review of Sociology*. 30, no. 1 (2004): 335-357.

actions are sanctioned and permitted. Violent actors are to blame for their criminal acts while police and officials are sanctioned and justified in their violent actions. The depiction of violence in television crime drama is framed and shaped in ways that both privilege some behaviors and dismiss others, as well as offering judgment on the actors who carry out the behaviors. Characters populating crime dramas occupy clear categories, including criminal and official.

Official authorities in fictional programs are characters shown as having responsibility to enforce laws and control the behavior of others. These authorities have discretion in many acts they perform, including the use of violence. Through certain signs, including the use of styles of clothing, badges, cards and verbal signs, certain individuals are granted powers, including arrest, self-defense and restraint, that are not granted to other individuals. Those individuals assigned official positions are allowed and expected to exercise authority over other people. Those officials can and do have legal powers, decision choices and conduct rules that are not held by non-officials.⁴ A key difference between officials and non-officials is the range of cases when officials can employ violence with justification.

The justification of violence is most often linked to the characters who are involved in a violent incident. The evaluation of justification also depends on contextual factors, information, belief and chronology of events when the characters engage in violent interactions. Justification of an action indicates that a seemingly unacceptable act is

⁴ Malcom Thorburn, "Justifications, Powers, and Authority." *The Yale Law Journal*. 117, no. 6 (2008): 1095.

permissible.⁵ The findings in this study show that violent acts by police officers and other officials are overwhelmingly portrayed as justified in television crime dramas. Some violent acts by officials are not considered justified, indicating that other factors of context are sometimes relevant for the determination of justification of violence.

Violence on television is frequently justified by virtue of how it is framed. Framing helps determine how viewers experience events, and the creators of the content do it through matching scenes, acting, dialog, and concepts within performances to certain viewer beliefs and expectations. Framing can also highlight specific areas for attention or interest. Television content is packaged and presented to the viewers through the framing of programming by the producers of the media.⁶ Conveying to the viewers that one character is an official authority is the most common method that signals justified violence.

Individuals on crime dramas who are involved in violent incidents and are not portrayed as officials are almost always seen to be unjustified in their violent actions. It is clear when reviewing crime dramas that individuals who act violently are considered to be justified most often if cloaked with the color of authority. Individuals who perform violent acts without color of authority are likely to be seen as unjustified. Unjustified individuals are labeled with terms like ‘criminal’, ‘perpetrator’ and ‘villain.’

This study uses term with a technical legal meaning. Legal scholars in the United States use the term state actor to mean a person who acts with the authority of a

⁵ Eric Reitan, The Moral Justification of Violence: Epistemic Considerations. *Social Theory and Practice*. 28, no. 3 (2002): 446.

⁶ Dietram A. Scheufele "Framing as a theory of media effects." *Journal of communication* 49, no. 1 (1999): 103.

government body.⁷ This research uses the legal definition to assign the role of a state actor within the samples of television crime dramas being analyzed. The term ‘state actor’ will not be used because of the possibility confusion. The term official will be used in this study to indicate a state actor is being discussed.

Violence on television takes many forms and has been studied using differing approaches. This study identifies violent incidents in crime dramas and records whether a violent character is official or nonofficial, and whether the violence they perpetrate is justified. The next section will detail the research questions of this study and explore the restricted types of violence that are under investigation here.

What Television Violence this Research Highlights

This thesis is designed to quantify how violence under the color of authority is justified in fictional television crime drama programming in the U.S., and will be supported by a content analysis using a sample of television dramas from the 2011 season. The previous section described officials on television, justification of violence and the concept of social facts expressed through television programming. The research performed for this study adds to the understanding of media portrayals of officially sanctioned violence through analysis of the content of television crime dramas.

The study investigates two research questions, and proposes two hypotheses: R1: *How many incidents of violence within television drama are performed by officials?* R2: *How many incidents of violence by officials are justified within crime drama programs?*

⁷ Jeremy Daniel Kernodle, Policing the Police: Clarifying the Test for Holding the Government Liable Under 42 U.S.C. Secs 1983 and the State-created Danger Theory. *Vanderbilt Law Review*. 54, no. 1 (2001): 165.

H1: *The majority of incidents of violence performed by non-officials will not be justified within television crime dramas.* H2: *The majority of incidents of violence carried out by officials will be justified within television crime dramas.* Findings relating to these two questions and hypotheses are detailed in Chapter Four.

This study uses a quantitative content analysis of television crime dramas. Data collection is carried out on samples of eight crime drama programs. The crime drama genre is television programming that focuses on criminal behavior. These entertainment-themed crime dramas are fictional, with characters and events which do not portray real-life individuals or events. The television crime dramas often contain high counts of violence and portray police or other official authorities.

While many researchers have reported quantitative findings of incidents in violence, very few have looked specifically at violence by police or other authorities. The research answering questions similar to this study are investigations into portrayal of police on television programs. Studies have examined the representation of law enforcement in television dramas.⁸ Many studies analyzed the gender, race and social composition of characters portrayed in television dramas.⁹ This study focuses on one genre of fictional television to look at the aspects of official authority and justification in the portrayal of violent incidents.

Television dramas offer a mirror of features of society including attitudes toward violence, beliefs around authority and justification of the use of force. The portrayal of

⁸ Joseph R. Dominick, "Crime and Law Enforcement on Prime-Time Television." *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 37, no. 2 (Summer, 1973): 241.

⁹ Henry Taylor and Carol Dozier. "Television Violence, African-Americans, and Social Control, 1950-1976." *Journal of Black Studies*. 14, no. 2 (1983): 107.

the behavior of police and other officials in television dramas sometime represents their role and behavior in contemporary society. Television can function as a mirror of complex social and cultural structure showing representations of current social relations. This study explores entertainment television as a first step in identifying cultural values around violence by police and officials. The examination of crime drama television aids in understanding cultural attitudes entangled in officially sanctioned violence.

While the portrayal of violence under official sanction is present in most episodes of crime drama television, there has been very little scholarly attention to this aspect of television programming. The lack of attention to this potential research topic has possible social causes; many people in the United States have ambivalent attitudes toward violence performed under color of authority. Police officials act to protect society and improve social conditions, but, sometimes official violence is unjustified. The following section maps the landscape of studies of media violence by reviewing the literature.

When Television Violence has been Researched

For more than a half century, analysis of violent content on television has included counts of incidents of violence and accounts of many aspects of media violence and connections to real life effects. Since the early 1960s, scholars investigating media violence have suggested the connection between violence as presented in media to social violence in the United States. One causal factor in the interest in links between media violence and societal violence involves the dramatic increase in violence in the

mid-1960s.¹⁰ Media research supports claims that exposure to media violence can influence some people to behave aggressively and can shape viewer's perceptions and attitudes toward violence.¹¹

The golden age of media effects research, from 1930 to 1980, used learning models grounded in a positivist paradigm.¹² The application of the positivist paradigm in media research entailed laboratory research and quantitative methodologies to generate and support theoretical frameworks relating to data around violence represented in media. Media effects research has supported models relating to violence that offer explanations of links between mediated displays of violence to behaviors of individual viewers. This research has accumulated findings that vary widely along a continuum representing the role of media portrayals in leading to actual violence.

One factor contributing to the variation in findings in media effects research pertaining to violence, are the multiple ways of defining of violence employed by researchers. There is the example of the Cultural Indicators project developed by George Gerbner et al., which uses a broad definition for violence. In the case of Albert Bandura the definition of violence in media incorporates wider concepts, including concepts developed in

¹⁰ Craig A. Anderson and Brad J Bushman. "Effects of Violent Video Games on Aggressive Behavior, Aggressive Cognition, Aggressive Affect, Physiological Arousal, and Pro-social Behavior: A Meta-analytic Review." *Psychological Science*. 12, no. 5 (2001): 353.

¹¹ Smith, Stacy L., and Edward Donnerstein. "Harmful effects of exposure to media violence: Learning of aggression, emotional desensitization, and fear." In *Human aggression: Theories, research, and implications for social policy*. (pp. 167-202). (San Diego, CA, US: Academic Press 1998): 167.

¹² John L. Sherry, "Media effects theory and the nature/nurture debate: A historical overview and directions for future research." *Media Psychology* 6, no. 1 (2004): 83.

the field of psychology.¹³ For the studies by Dale Kunkel et al., violence is understood as contextually framed, and acts are considered as continuous exchanges between characters.¹⁴ The definitions of violence used in research reflects views toward violence and the desire of researchers to explore specific aspects of mediated violence.

Decades of media effects research have seen extensive efforts to establish the influences that viewing of media content has on audience behavior, however, some scholarship questions the behavioral influence of media.¹⁵ A number of researchers suggest that limited exposure to television violence reduces viewer aggression.¹⁶ This study continues the refinement of the term violence by building a definition from those used in multiple studies. The next section explores the ways that media violence and social violence share features, context and meanings.

Where Television and Society Overlap

Violence has been a social constant throughout the history of the United States.¹⁷

¹³ Slocum, J. David. "Introduction: Violence and American Cinema: Notes for an Investigation." *Violence and American Cinema*. Ed. J. David Slocum. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2001): 2.

¹⁴ Dale Kunkel, Dale, Barbara Wilson, Edward Donnerstein, Daniel Linz, Stacy Smith, Timothy Gray, Eva Blumenthal, and W. James Potter. "Standpoint: Measuring television violence: The importance of context." *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 39, no. 2 (1995): 288.

¹⁵ Barrie Gunter. *Media research methods*. (London: Sage 2000): 12.

¹⁶ Seymour Feshbach, "Reality and fantasy in filmed violence," in *Television and social behavior: Television and social learning*, eds. J. Murray, E. Rubinstein and G. Comstock (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1972).

¹⁷ Richard B. Felson. "Mass media effects on violent behavior." *Annual Review of Sociology* 22, no. 1 (1996): 103.

As H. Rap Brown said, “Violence is as American as cherry pie.”¹⁸ America often is permeated with reports, representations and references of and to violence, both factual and fictional. The U.S. news media and political leaders speak constantly of war, violence and dangerous conflict. The history of the United States is taught to students primarily by summarizing incidents of crime and violence in its past.¹⁹ Society in the United States is filled with violence, and entertainment television contains equally significant amounts of violence; violence can be seen as a frame for American entertainment as well as a reality of American life.²⁰

Reflecting the view that depictions of American society on television mirror what exists in the surrounding culture, the pervasive presence of violence in television programming indicates a strong social preoccupation around the topic. Many of the social discourses around issues of violence and conflict include references to television media due to the pervasiveness of television programming in this country. Violence is a large-part of the social message shared through television portrayals, and serves to both entertain and offer visions shared between members of the viewing public.

Television has saturated American consumers in the last decades of the 20th century at higher rates than other media and has become a powerful part of the social fabric.

¹⁸ H. Rap Brown was chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in the 1960s, and later the Justice Minister of the Black Panther Party. This quote from Brown was cited in Taylor, Henry and Carol Dozier. “Television Violence, African-Americans, and Social Control, 1950-1976. *Journal of Black Studies*. 14, no. 2 (1983): 108.

¹⁹ Henry Taylor and Carol Dozier . Television Violence, African-Americans, and Social Control, 1950-1976. *Journal of Black Studies*. 14, no. 2 (1983): 107.

²⁰ Steven D. Stark. Perry Mason Meets Sonny Crockett: The History of Lawyers and the Police as Television Heroes. *University of Miami Law Review*. 42, no. 1 (1987): 229.

Scholars describe how viewers see aspects of U.S. society through media portrayals.²¹ For some of contemporary society, television serves as a reflection and benchmark for individuals to memorialize social events, activities and relationships.

Television interprets stories of life in the United States and is a way people share common social definitions and explanations. Neil Postman states that television is the way society principally knows about itself and that how television stages the world is seen as a model for how the world should be staged.²² Viewers often interpret the stories and messages depicted on television as the values and norms of U.S. society.²³ Television dramas show displays of social commentary and social explanations. One aspect of society that is reflected in television includes acts of violence and the reinforcement of stereotypes showing who is violent and who is not violent.

While many media researchers seek to find the causal influences that media brings to bear on society, this study focuses on how one aspect of current society is portrayed or represented in dramatic television entertainment. Individuals decide who is violent in society based on social norms and personal experiences. Some violence is considered to be acceptable and sanctioned. Violence performed by officials is often sanctioned and justified when seen in society and when shown in fictional media programming. This study focuses on the justification of violence when performed by officials.

Dramatic television programming can be used to aid in identification of important

²¹ Sheila Brown. *Crime and law in media culture*. (Maidenhead, U. K.: Open University Press, 2003): 1.

²² Neil Postman. *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. (New York: Penguin Books 1985): 92.

²³ Donna J. Hess and Geoffrey W. Grant. "Prime-time television and gender-role behavior." *Teaching Sociology*. 10, no. 3 (1983): 371.

cultural issues, and as a method to understand what meaning should be assigned to these issues. Television, through its portrayals, serves to portray a roadmap for the worlds of violence and justice. These roadmaps offer views or scenes and images of crimes of violent behavior that are not experienced in normal daily life. Television offers an understanding of violence that is transferred through fictional portrayals. In the depiction of violence, there are clear codes of conduct that indicate whether perpetrators of violence are justified or criminal. Shows suggest cheering for criminal perpetrators of violence to be caught and punished while suggesting that heroic violent actors will be forgiven and rewarded.

This section has developed the viewpoint that society and television have overlapping meanings and interpretations. The goal of this study is to quantify information about the portrayal of violence by officials and the justification assigned to those portrayals. The next section will address the ways this study contributes to media inquiry.

How this Research Contributes to the Field

Much of dramatic entertainment television content portrays the actions and after effects of crime, conflict and violence. The constant intense depiction of violence on entertainment television acts to disseminate specific stories to wide audiences and offer uniform visions and conceptions of reality. Dramatic television shows are a means by which individuals gain an understanding of violence and criminal justice.²⁴ Many viewers of dramatic television shows believe the presentations of criminal activity and the justice system in these shows are real, which makes it difficult, for them, to determine the line

²⁴ Aleksadras Dobryninas, Margarita Dobrynina, Ilona Česnienė, Algirdas Giedraitis, and Egidijus Merkevičius. "On Perceptions of Criminal Justice in Society." *Sociologija*. Min-tis ir veiksmai 2, no. 31 (2012): 224.

between fiction and reality.²⁵

Media portrayals, including those on television, have mediated the public's understandings of violence as a result of images that are combinations of real life experience and fictional representations. Some viewers have some confusion between real world events and fictional ones, leading to difficulty in identifying how viewers have constructed their beliefs about deviant social behavior.²⁶ Media representations serve to present examples of social norms and opinions. The public's conception of violence is represented and misrepresented in ways similar to how television shows depict violent behavior. The space between fact and fiction is difficult to locate, and fiction is often intentionally portrayed as factual.

While there is evidence for media effects on members of society, an underappreciated aspect is how and to what extent society impacts media. Numerous researchers involved in the study of media consider its ramifications and effects on the viewers or audience members. This study focuses on the viewpoint that dramatic television programming reflects shared social ideas and ideals. The contribution this study makes is to add to the knowledge of aspects of society that are portrayed in television dramas.

A literature review in Chapter Two elaborates the importance of this focused study, through mapping the previous research performed in the study of media violence, in the United States. This study employs the framework that television reflects and is generated through interpretations and reinterpretations of the larger social world. The ways

²⁵ Ken Dowler, Thomas Fleming, and Stephen L. Muzzatti. Constructing Crime: Media, Crime, and Popular Culture. *Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice*. 48, no. 6 (2006): 837.

²⁶ Ibid, 838.

that society in the U.S. values and attends to television programs helps to construct the meaning and use of television. Dramatic television represents social truths regarding violence and treats violence as an important component of society. How television frames social issues such as violence offers a blueprint for how violence is to be understood and justified. Current television dramas frame violence by including some ideas while excluding others; the framing of violence determines whose violence is justified. This study uncovers new information about how television dramas represent violence under color of authority.

How this Research Presentation is Structured

This study offers a descriptive report of the portrayal of violence on television. It begins a mapping of the terrain of justified official violence that features in the production of fictional crime programming in the current television market. Previous descriptive research, in the field, has underrepresented the issue of official police violence in dramatic television. Because of the limited scholarly resources for this research, this study has been designed to cover a limited time span of programming and specifically defined research questions are being explored. This study attempts to categorize and report the current practices of the portrayal of police violence in television. This inquiry required describing the portrayal of police violence in television dramas through the processing of a large amount of data. Similar research has been carried out, with different goals and different variables. Utilizing the data available for this study, and following examples from previous research led to use of quantitative content analysis as the methodology in this study.

Utilizing methodology, coding, classification and analytical tools which have been developed within the field of media effects of violence, the study is focused solely on quantification of portrayals of justified violent incidents in television crime dramas. The relevant media research studies are reviewed and discussed in the Chapter Two literature review. Some results of those studies contribute to the theoretical background of this research. The core focus is to identify and quantify the portrayal of police and official violence in television dramas, in order to aid in the understanding of the relationship of justified versus unjustified violence in television content. This study contains the results of a quantitative content analysis that enumerates the number of police or authorities in connection with violent acts and justified violent acts. Categories of violent behavior are developed, based on previous studies, to frame the analysis of the gathered data.

This content analysis provides data and analysis to answer the research questions posed, as well as support future research. The following chapters include information on the data selection process, the coding scheme that will be used, the steps to ensure validity and reliability of the data, the plan for data analysis, and the results and discussion of the study.

The structure of this study takes the form of five chapters, including this introductory chapter. Chapter Two contains an overview of the research literature focused on television violence with details of media effects research and other approaches to the study of violence. Multiple major definitions of violence are discussed to ground the choice of violence definition used in this study. An examination of research about official violence is explored to frame the analysis of violence under color of authority.

Chapter Three details the research design and methodology of this study. The

nature of the data available and the research questions influenced the choice of research design. The chapter details the coding choices, techniques and categorization used in the study, explains the sampling decisions made for choosing episodes of television crime dramas, and describes the steps taken to perform a valid content analysis of the coded data. Lastly, the chapter relates views about the limitations inherent in this study.

Chapter Four presents the findings of the research, focusing on the three key themes of total incidents of violence, counts of official violence and counts of justified violence. The chapter contains the findings from the content analyses of the television programs' and a subsequent discussion of the findings.

Chapter Five presents an overview of the study and offers discussions about both the findings and implications of those findings. This chapter suggests some thoughts for future research in this area. Finally, the chapter highlights key points and concludes the study.

CHAPTER II : LITERATURE REVIEW

The scholarly analysis of violence in fictional television programming has a long and deep history with studies that predominantly focus on the media effects on audiences.²⁷ The research into media violence and television portrayals of violence touch on many aspects of the effects of violence, measures of violence and regional variations in media violence content.

This literature review examines some of the research into media effects of violence, including historical perspectives on media violence, content analyses of media violence, definitions of violence and media studies of official violence. Also, attention is given to exploration of additional literature that offers insight into the research questions asked in this study, specifically how to identify incidents of violence, official violence and justification of violence.

Research into violence in media uses a grounding in techniques to identify the features and data which will be employed in the research. The identification of violence requires establishing an accepted definition of violence as part of the research process. Identifying government officials who act violently depends upon how perpetrators are categorized. Research studies exist relating techniques used to identify types of violence, violent characters and justified incidents of violence. Identifying the justification of violence follows from conventions of research in the field. The following section reviews historical research into media violence.

Historical Perspectives on Media Violence

Cultural conditions at different times have resulted in variations in the amounts

²⁷ David Newton. *Violence and the Media : A Reference Handbook*. (Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO. 1996): 100.

and intensity of reported media and television violence. Differing definitions, coding schemes and program samples also determine alternative results in accounts of media violence. Among the first rigorous studies of media violence, were those occurring as far back as the Payne Fund studies of movie violence performed in the 1920s and 1930s by Herbert Blumer and other researchers.²⁸ While the Payne Fund studies focused on film, they addressed media influences, including violence, through a series of studies of the effect on children's behavior caused by movies.

From the 1930s forward, continuous quantitative research has led to alternative support for ever-changing media effects theories.²⁹ The field of media effects studies is deep and contentious; some researchers offer a simple three step model of media effects history and others suggest more complex histories of the field. The beginning of media effects research derives from strongly positivist approaches employing scientific methods of measurement and quantification. Media effects research has numerous contributors who offer different elements to the overall research paradigm.

In the 1940s, Paul Lazarsfeld at the Bureau of Applied Social Research reported findings in media effects obtained from a series of panel studies to explore the role of mass communication in individual decision-making. Lazarsfeld concluded that people often ignore the intended influences of media and proposed that mass media results in

²⁸ Herbert Blumer. "Conclusion." In *Movies and Conduct*. (New York: Macmillan & Company 1933): 192.

²⁹ W. Russell Neuman and Lauren Guggenheim. "The Evolution of Media Effects Theory: A Six-Stage Model of Cumulative Research." *Communication Theory* 21, no. 2 (2011): 169-196.

limited effects on audiences.³⁰ His limited effects hypothesis states that mass media is not effective in promoting specific ideas. Instead, according to Lazarsfeld, individuals are shaped by media over a lifetime and through the media's emphasis on some parts of the social world over other parts.³¹

The limited effects model received additional support in the following years. Joseph T. Klapper recapped the existing media effects research of the time in one volume,³² concluding that, under some conditions, the limited effects model supports some media influence on audiences. This view of the limited effects theory of media argues that mass communication reinforces individual predispositions. Carl Hovland added to effects theory with the refinement that individuals are less likely to avoid group think when they are tightly integrated into the group that is sharing messages that encourage change. Hovland also supported the importance of motivation in attitude change.³³

Researchers in the 1960s and 1970s offered views of how individuals react to messages from the media. Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann reconceptualized the view of how mass media could impact people by exploring how individuals can become locked into silence out of fear.³⁴ This approach implies that media has an effect on people through

³⁰ Paul F. Lazarsfeld, "Communication research and the social psychologist." In *Current Trends in Social Psychology*. Edited by W. Dennis. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press 1948): 158.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 255.

³² Joseph T. Klapper. *The Effects of Mass Communication*. Glencoe, IL: The Free Press. 1960.

³³ Joseph T. Klapper. *The Effects of Mass Communication*. Glencoe, IL: The Free Press. 1960.

³⁴ Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann. "Mass media and social change in developed societies." *Mass Media and Social Change*. (Beverly Hills: Sage 1981).

limiting the options of individuals. Sandra Ball-Rokeach contributes from the field of public opinion research and explores how isolated individuals depend on the mass media to define social reality.³⁵ By the 1960s, more studies began, paving the way for future research in how individuals react to media violence.

One prominent study in the 1960s had direct bearing on research into violence in media. The Bandura studies, while not strictly a study of the effects of media violence, feature depictions of adults hitting Bobo dolls shown to children on video monitors.³⁶ The Bandura studies are an important contribution to social learning theory and support the belief that children learn aggression from mediated sources. Albert Bandura assigned young children to watch a video of an adult actor engaging in aggression toward a Bobo doll. After assigning young children to watch the aggressive adult behavior, he found that those children who saw the actor being aggressive toward the Bobo doll were more likely to act aggressively toward the Bobo doll when given the opportunity.

The Bobo doll experimental study has been asserted to show relationships between television and aggression.³⁷ While this series of experiments is iconic in psychology research, some scholars have questioned the findings.³⁸ One question raised is the influence of using Bobo dolls, which are designed for the one purpose of being hit, which

³⁵ Sandra J. Ball-Rokeach. (1986) "Media and the fabric of sociology." In J. F. Short (ed.), *The Social Fabric: Dimensions and Issues*. (Newbury Park, CA: Sage. 1985).

³⁶ Albert Bandura, D. Ross and S. A. Ross. "Imitation of film-mediated aggressive models." *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 66, 3–11, 1963: 3.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

³⁸ Christopher J. Ferguson and Stephanie M Rueda. "The Hitman Study: Violent Video Game Exposure Effects on Aggressive Behavior, Hostile Feelings, and Depression." *European Psychologist*. 15, no. 2 (2010): 99.

likely impacts any Bobo doll experiments.

Another major study in media violence was carried out in the 1960s by George Gerbner. Gerbner led research investigating violence in network television drama beginning in 1967-68 for the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence. These investigations continued through 1972 with the sponsorship of the Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behavior.³⁹ The studies reported on the role and the extent of violence in television dramas. Gerbner sought support for the approach of studying television as a tool of enculturation instead of its role serving entertainment and information functions.⁴⁰

Numerous studies have been carried out on the effect of media violence on children. A perspective put forth by L. Rowell Huesmann states that there are long term effects of exposure to violent television.⁴¹ Huesmann carried out longitudinal studies which covered the same sample subjects over years of time. The findings suggest that the levels of violence in our society may have been increased by the "long-term effects of many persons' childhood exposure to a steady diet of dramatic media violence."⁴² Stadler states that one explanatory framework supported in the field of the effects of media

³⁹ George Gerbner and Larry Gross. "Living with television: The violence profile." *Journal of communication* 26, no. 2 (1976): 172.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 173.

⁴¹ L. Rowell Huesmann and Laurie S. Miller. "Long-term effects of repeated exposure to media violence in childhood." In *Aggressive behavior*, pp. 153-186. (US:Springer US, 1994):154.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 155.

on young audiences is Huesmann's theory of observational learning of social behavior and scripts.⁴³ Huesmann's theory is that children observe role models and memorize scripts so that they can act out roles in later situations. Children are learning behaviors, including violent ones, through observation and modeling.

The long-term studies of media effects of violence increased in number in the 1960s, highlighted by the long term study known as the Cultural Indicators Project led to a theoretical approach called cultivation theory. Cultivation theory and other theoretical approaches to the effects of violence are detailed in the next section.

Media Violence

Theories and hypotheses that support the assertion that viewing violent television results in real world violence have developed through research into media effects. There are multiple programs of research into media studies with different foundations and approaches. Bandura elaborated on a model of observational learning, Huesmann offered a theory of observational learning and behavioral scripts to address how memories of aggressive behavior are stored and recalled; and George Gerbner developed cultivation theory based on long-term research of television violence.

Media effects research serves as the developmental source for cultivation theory. One aspect of Gerbner's research draws a clear line between media content and events in the external world. Gerbner states television serves as a mythology, which through

⁴³ Jane Stadler. "Risks and rewards: media, globalisation, and citizens of a democracy." In *Communication for the citizens towards a contemporary society* (Portugal: Municipality of Oeiras Europress. Stadler 2004):182.

repetition builds themes that result in cultivating conceptions of reality.⁴⁴ The viewers are the subject of cultivation theory through media's effect on them.

Cultivation theory is one model for exploring media effects on audiences.⁴⁵ Cultivation theory attempts to explain how the exposure to television affects an individual's view of reality. Cultivation theory asserts that television is responsible for a large part of the viewer's perceptions of reality and suggests that television influences the viewer's beliefs about the world with repetitive messages. This model asserts that increasing television viewing results in increasing television's influence on an individual's view of reality. Gerbner and others carried out multiple assessments of how television portrayed violence. One conclusion by Gerbner as part of cultivation theory was that television has a significant impact on perceptions of violence in society. While much research was carried out in cultivation theory as applied to television viewing, questions have been raised relating to its power of accounting for television's effects.⁴⁶

Cultivation theory requires modification if it is to remain useful as a means for analyzing media effects. As early as 1976, George Comstock stated, "It is also difficult to escape the impression that there are very wide differences in the acceptance of the

⁴⁴ George Gerbner. "Reclaim our cultural mythology: television's global marketing strategy creates a damaging and alienated window on the world." *Ecology of justice*. 38, Spring (1994): 40.

⁴⁵ George Gerbner. "Cultivation analysis: An overview." *Mass Communication and Society* 1. no. 3-4 (1998): 177.

⁴⁶ W. James Potter. *Cultivation Theory and Research: A Conceptual Critique*. *Human Communication Research*. 19. no. 4 (1993): 564.

findings.”⁴⁷ Hirsch suggests that a perceived relationship between exposures to violence on television and fear of crime is better explained by the viewer's neighborhood.⁴⁸ Another criticism relates to the changes that have occurred in television production methods and approaches since cultivation theory was first developed.⁴⁹ Horace Newcomb and Paul M. Hirsch argue that television drama replays rather than reproduces a culture's dominant assumptions.⁵⁰ Scholars see the conflicts portrayed in television drama, embedded in familiar and fictional frames, as ongoing conflicts in American social experience and cultural history.⁵¹ Joseph Dominick suggests that those who watch television as a time filler or out of habit are impacted more than people whose viewing is planned and directed.⁵² Some changes to cultivation theory and additional theories address some of these concerns.

Later developments by Gerbner and his colleagues included the ideas of mainstreaming, resonance and mean-world syndrome, addressing some of the concerns of the critics of cultivation theory. Mainstreaming describes uniform media effects on diverse

⁴⁷ George Comstock, “The effects of television on children and adolescents: The evidence so far.” *Journal of Communication*. 25, no. 4 (1975): 29.

⁴⁸ Hirsch, Paul M. "The 'Scary World' of the Nonviewer and Other Anomalies. A Reanalysis of Gerbner et al.'s Findings on Cultivation Analysis Part I." *Communication research* 7, no. 4 (1980): 403.

⁴⁹ Potter. “Cultivation Theory and Research” (1993), 564.

⁵⁰ Horace M. Newcomb and Paul M. Hirsch. "Television as a cultural forum: Implications for research." *Quarterly Review of Film & Video* 8, no. 3 (1983): 45.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁵² Joseph R. Dominick. *The Dynamics of Mass Communication*. (New York: McGraw-Hill 1990): 514.

television audiences;⁵³ resonance is the comparison between the media constructs and a viewer's life experiences;⁵⁴ and mean-world syndrome results after viewers are exposed to large amounts of television violence which causes them to perceive the real world as a mean, violent place.

Gerbner suggests that individuals who view violence from a young age experience three outcomes, which together form the mean world syndrome. People who view more than three hours of television per day believe they live in a mean world and have their fears and anxieties reinforced.⁵⁵ The mean world syndrome reduces an individual's sensitivity to the consequences of violence and increases feelings of vulnerability and dependence.⁵⁶ These three theories are media effects theories which address ways that violent media can influence viewers.

There are multiple channels of influence on viewers through exposure to violent programming, including aggression, desensitization, and fear.⁵⁷ Violence occurs on a regular basis in dramatic programming, as well as in commercial advertising and media advertising. Scholars in 2003 found high levels of depictions of violence in advertising

⁵³ Johathan Cohen and Gabriel Weimann. "Cultivation revisited: Some genres have some effects on some viewers." *Communication Reports* 13, no. 2 (2000): 3.

⁵⁴ L. J. Shrum and Valerie Darmanin Bischak. "Mainstreaming, Resonance, and Impersonal Impact." *Human Communication Research* 27, no. 2 (2001): 187.

⁵⁵ George Gerbner, "Reclaim our cultural mythology" (1994): 40.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁵⁷ American Academy of Pediatrics, "Media Violence," *Pediatrics* 108, no. 2 (November 2001): 1222.

that promote television programs.⁵⁸ Cultivation theory is not the only way to assess the results of viewing violence on television. One criticism of cultivation theory results from the history of lumping genres of fictional productions together as a basis for analysis. The effects of television violence on audiences are harder to assess than earlier researchers believed. The consensus about the impact of viewing violence in media is that there likely is a range of modest effects on attitudes and beliefs, on emotions and possibly on behavior.⁵⁹

Effects of viewing violent television seemed to correlate with an increase of violence in the cultural landscape from the 1960s through the 1980s in the United States. With the rise in violent crime beginning in the 1960s, there were concerns among social scientists, politicians and the public about exposure to television violence causing increased aggression among audience members. Many of the early studies in response to the political concern were audience effect studies using content analyses methods.

Content Analysis of Media Violence

Content analysis is one effective tool to use for assessing violence in television content. A long-term content analysis of television programming with a component of violence is the work of the Cultural Indicators Project. The research consisted of message system analyses and enculturation analysis to analyze conceptions of social reality. More

⁵⁸ Bruce Bartholow, Karen Dill, Kathryn Anderson, and James Lindsay, "The Proliferation of Media Violence and Its Economic Underpinnings," In *Advances in Applied Developmental Psychology: Media Violence and Children*, ed. Douglas Gentile, (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing, 2003), 12.

⁵⁹ Andrea Milwood Hargrave and Sonia Livingstone. *Harm and Offence in Media Content: A Review of the Evidence*. (Bristol, GB: Intellect 2006): 196.

current work with content analysis has been carried out exploring media violence, including content analysis of violence on television investigating the context of violent portrayals and linking the content analysis categories appropriate for the research.⁶⁰ The content analysis project performed by Dale Kunkel et al., pursued linking content in television to research evidence of harmful effects of television violence. The characteristics of messages affect the influence of television on viewers.

Nancy Signorielli and others continued to re-examine the Cultural Indicators Project research from 1993 to 2003 with different methodology. Their research specifically examined the extent and location of violence as spread among the different networks and was carried out through the lens of cultivation theory. That study of prime-time programming found the number of violent actions ranged from 3.06 per program to 8.2 per program. They found that the level of violence did not change between the spring of 1993 and the fall of 2001. Another finding of the study was that most programs do not show any long-term consequences of violence, such as remorse, regret or sanctions.⁶¹ Overall, the study reinforced the findings that people who watch more television often believe that they are living in a mean and dangerous world.⁶²

The content analyses of violence on television reviewed in this chapter relates to the present study through shared methodologies. Barbara J. Wilson et al., carried out a

⁶⁰ Dale Kunkel, Barbara Wilson, Edward Donnerstein, Daniel Linz, Stacy Smith, Timothy Gray, Eva Blumenthal, and W. James Potter. "Standpoint: Measuring television violence: The importance of context." *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 39, no. 2 (1995): 285.

⁶¹ Nancy Signorielli. "Prime-time Violence 1993-2001: Has the Picture Really Changed?" *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*. 47, no. 1 (2003): 54.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 55.

content analysis examining the contextual features which might increase or decrease effects of viewing television violence. The findings point to attending to important differences between shows and suggests separating out subgenres of television programs in terms of media effects.⁶³

Sarah Eschholz, Matthew Mallard and Stacey Flynn carried out a content analysis of the television dramas *NYPD Blue* and *Law & Order*. The study focused on the 2000 to 2001 season and explored how the show displayed issues of justice. The categories examined in this study (race, gender, justice personal and civil rights violations) were compared to statistics in the real world. Some findings of the study were the stereotyped treatment of minorities as criminals and misrepresentations of crime resolution rates. The study contributed to the field by offering inferences about social responses to the misrepresentations.⁶⁴

While the present study focuses on U.S. crime dramas, there are lessons to be learned from international studies into media violence even though there are some differences between U.S. and International television programming. Sarah M. Coyne and John Archer carried out content analysis of British television programs. Through a content analysis of 228 hours of television programming, the researchers determined that indirect aggression was portrayed in 92.04% of all episodes analyzed. This study demonstrated that indirect aggression was portrayed more frequently than physical and verbal

⁶³ Barbara J. Wilson, Stacy L. Smith, W. James Potter, Dale Kunkel, Daniel Linz, Carolyn M. Colvin, and Edward Donnerstein. "Violence in children's television programming: Assessing the risks." *Journal of Communication* 52, no. 1 (2002): 5.

⁶⁴ Sarah Eschholz, Matthew Mallard, and Stacey Flynn. "Images of prime time justice: a content analysis of "NYPD Blue" and "Law & Order"." *Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture* 10, no. 3 (2004): 162.

aggression in British television programming.⁶⁵

Existing content analysis of aspects of violence in television programming covers many important questions of study around the issue, while additional questions remain to be answered. These studies fulfill the need to make links between the content analysis counts of violence and connection to social issues that go beyond what most quantitative analysis is equipped to resolve. One feature that requires additional study is how official action or police action is represented in fictional television programming. There are questions of how and when official violence is excused which can be identified and quantified through content analysis. Each of these studies employs definitions of violence to enable gathering data on that variable; the definitions of violence used in studies often vary based on the needs of each research project.

Defining Violence

Defining violence and determining measures for it are questions crucial to studies of violence on television. Researchers have found it difficult to unambiguously define violence for use in media studies. How researchers define violence will often determine the types of violence included, and excluded, in an analysis. Analyses funded by media networks usually end up coding less violence compared to research unaffiliated with commercial interests.⁶⁶ These discrepancies seem to follow because of differences in definitions applied to television violence, and the interpretation of those definitions, and

⁶⁵ Sarah M. Coyne and John Archer. "Indirect aggression in the media: A content analysis of British television programs." *Aggressive Behavior* 30, no. 3 (2004): 254.

⁶⁶ John Condry. *The Psychology of Television*. (Hillsdale, N.J.: L. Erlbaum Assoc.1989): 10.

because networks have an interest in downplaying reports about the amount of violent depictions they disseminate. Research findings are dependent on the definition of violence used.

Clearly defining violence in television and establishing quantitative measurements for it are important steps toward aiding researchers in analyzing counts of violence portrayed in specific fictional episodes. Accurate counts of incidents of violence in television require that verbal abuse, aggressive humor, and other modes of psychological violence present on television be included in any analysis.⁶⁷ Most contemporary content analysts have included psychological or verbal violence to some degree in their definition of television violence.⁶⁸

Definitions of violence on television must consider the difference in values and judgments of viewers.⁶⁹ One study based on interviews was carried out by David E. Morrison and Andrea Millwood in 2007. They found that definitions of violence vary by person and context.⁷⁰ While some viewers do not see psychological aggression as violent, others do. In a 1986 study, 16 % of children included verbal aggression in their own

⁶⁷ A. H. Stein and L. K. Friedrich. Television content and young children's behavior. In J. P. Murray, E. A. Rubinstein, & G. A. Comstock (Eds.), *Television and social learning*. (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office 1972): 202.

⁶⁸ W. James Potter and William Ware. "An analysis of the contexts of antisocial acts on prime-time television." *Communication Research* 14, no. 6 (1987): 664.

⁶⁹ B. Gunter and J. Harrison and M. Wykes. *Violence on television: Distribution, form, context and themes* (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum 2003): 32-22.

⁷⁰ David E. Morrison and Andrea Millwood. 'The meaning and definition of violence', *International Journal of Media and Cultural Politics* 3, no. 3 (2007): 294.

definition of TV violence.⁷¹

George Gerbner, when analyzing content on television with the Cultural Indicators Project, defined violence as: “The overt expression of physical force (with or without a weapon, against self or other) compelling action against one's will on pain of being hurt or killed, or actually hurting or killing.”⁷² This definition focuses on overt physical force and as such, excludes idle threats, verbal abuse, or gestures that do not result in hurting or killing. The Cultural Indicators definition includes fantasy, comic, and "acts of nature" violence. A violent action is defined as "a scene of some violence confined to the same characters, even if interrupted by a flashback. When a new character (or characters) enters the scene, it becomes another separate action.”⁷³

The University of California at Santa Barbara (UCSB) produced the National Television Violence Study (NTVS) and designed a framework for analyzing violent content in cable programming in the three-year Independent Television Monitoring Project. The UCSB team defined violence as “Any overt depiction of a credible threat of physical force or the actual use of such force intended to physically harm an animate being or group of beings.”⁷⁴ Violence also includes certain depictions of physically harmful consequences against an animate being or group that occur as a result of unseen violent

⁷¹ T. A. Van der Voort. *Television violence: A child's-eye view*. (New York: Elsevier Science Publishing Company 1986): 9.

⁷² Signorielli, Nancy, George Gerbner, and Michael Morgan. "Standpoint: Violence on television: The cultural indicators project." (1995): 278.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 281.

⁷⁴ Margaret Seawell, *National Television Violence Study, Volume 1*. (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, Inc1997): 41.

means. This definition details three primary types of violent depictions, “credible threats, behavioral acts and harmful consequences.”⁷⁵ The UCSB's definition puts emphasis on intention to harm which is an internal mental state not available to direct observation. The UCSB's definition includes acts intended to cause harm, but are unsuccessful, in that the intentions of those failed attempts can be inferred.

The UCSB's definition excludes verbal assaults that intimidate or acts intended to cause psychological or emotional harm, including embarrassment and humiliation. The study did include credible threats because those acts cause harm. The definition requires that a person who possesses intentions be involved as a perpetrator and that an individual is targeted for physical harm, in this definition of violence.⁷⁶ That definition categorizes violent incidents to require interaction between “a perpetrator, an act, and a target.”⁷⁷ A violent sequence is the related set of actions that occur without breaks in the flow of violence. This definition shows sophistication through a shift of focus on human aggression from direct, physical and serious towards forms including indirect, psychological and less serious.

Counting acts of violence in television requires clear guidelines that direct the identification of incidents of violence. The guidelines should include directions about the intensity of a violent act to count. The level of intensity of violent acts can vary along a

⁷⁵ Dale Kunkel, “Measuring television violence” (1995), 284.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 287.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 288.

spectrum which includes harm and offense.⁷⁸ For this thesis, television violence is defined as actions which cause harm or are designed to cause harm to individuals, either physically or psychologically, including implicit threats, nonverbal behavior, and outbursts of anger. Antisocial activities with aggressive intent, such as deceit and hostility when including elements of threat are included in this analysis.⁷⁹ This definition mostly derives from the Gerbner studies, with some modifications.

This study postulates that counts of incidents of violence on television are valuable, even accepting the definition of violence as an unstable variable. This review of efforts in defining violence in media has addressed some aspects while overlooking some aspects of the meaning of violence and threat in media. As demonstrated in this review the definition of violence is a changing ground, which has not prevented valuable studies in the field. The future may see more changes in definitions as the conventions of television violence are likely to change as the practices in television production and narration evolves.

Color of Authority on Television

Law enforcement personnel and practices hold contradictory positions in U.S. society. The exercise of legal authority in society and as represented in television drama often occupies a grey area between legal and illegality. Just as there are contradictions within the actions of legal authorities, there are contradictory attitudes held by television

⁷⁸ Andrea Milwood Hargrave and Livingstone, *Harm and Offence in Media Content* (2006), 200.

⁷⁹ Anu Mustonen and Lea Pulkkinen, "Television violence: A development of a coding scheme." *Journal Of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 41, no. 2 (1997): 168.

viewers in the U.S.⁸⁰ While often the public hold officials in high regard, there are also feelings of suspicion toward authorities. This section explores the research into portrayals of police and authorities on television.

Research into media portrayals of police, crime and justice is extensive. Most research into media effects relating to police and justice have been carried out on crime dramas. Studies have taken place exploring the perception of police by members of the public and numerous studies have examined the role of race and gender in perceptions of crime and punishment. Police often act under the color of authority, and are granted rights and privileges that ordinary citizens do not have. This aspect of authority on television has a very limited body of research.

The phrase ‘under color of authority’ is used in the United States and covers individuals who represent themselves as acting as an appointed or authorized agent of governmental power. Sometimes the term is specifically used when actions would be considered unlawful.⁸¹ Because fictional dramas on television often feature police, prosecutors and other government agents, there is a large body of data that is available for study by researchers. This study focuses on analyzing portrayals of violence committed by officials and uses the phrase under color of authority to refer to official action.

Fictional television dramas in the United States contain high incidents of actions taken by legal authorities that might be interpreted as violent. How viewers judge acts of violence follow from several contingent issues; studies indicate viewers judge violence partially on perceived justification, attractiveness, heroism, and morality. Which violent

⁸⁰ Mariana Valverde, *Law and order: Images, meanings, myths*. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press 2006): 97.

⁸¹ West Publishing Company. *Judicial and Statutory Definitions of Words and Phrases, Volume 3* (Charleston, SC: Nabu Press 2013): 763.

acts viewers approved of depends on the multiple issues and the weights they give to those contingent issues.

Some studies have shown that viewers more often approve certain violent acts than others because of situational factors that might generate the violence.⁸² Defensive or reactive violence appears more justified than offensive violence for some viewers. Violence also is less offensive when an aggressor is shown as a hero instead of a villain. Likewise, violence by bad guys towards good guys is less acceptable to viewers.⁸³

Police are often portrayed as behaving in ways that would be considered violent and negative if performed by non-police. In a 2001 study, the show *NYPD Blue* showed an average of 2.7 civil rights violations per episode.⁸⁴ These violations were distributed among the following: lack of Miranda warnings, physical abuse, and false promises of leniency. Physical brutality was often viewed in *NYPD Blue* in which officers shoved suspects, and in some cases witnesses and informants, into walls and onto police cruisers often punching or kicking individuals during arrests. A study of the 2001 season of *NYPD Blue* explored the race and gender of characters in the programs and coded variables including types of crimes, types of weapons and civil rights violations.⁸⁵

Dana Mastro and Amanda Robinson researched the portrayals of minority groups on television to examine depictions of negative and stereotypical representations. Their

⁸² W. James Potter and W. Ware. "An analysis of the contexts of antisocial acts on prime time television." *Communication Research*, 14, no. 6 (1987): 665.

⁸³ T.A. Van der Voort, *Television violence* (New York: Elsevier Science Publishing Company 1986): 10.

⁸⁴ Sarah Eschholz, "Images of prime time justice" (2004), 161.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 162.

study involved a systematic content analysis of primetime fictional television. They analyzed the ratios of police officers and perpetrators and noted the race of each character. They found that police officers were significantly more likely to use excessive force during interactions with characters who were young racial minorities, instead of non minorities. The study found a use of force by police higher than real world reports.⁸⁶

Crime shows depict views that reflect society, but which may be interpreted by viewers in harmful ways. One study of crime dramas and crime documentaries described crime shows as sources of television in which viewers learn about crime in ways that likely amplify viewer fears. In that study, Lisa A. Kort Butler and Kelley J. Sittner Hartshorn suggest that crime programs serve ideological functions of support for some dominant views of crime and justice in society. The study also found complex relationships between viewing patterns, fear of crime, and opinions toward the criminal justice system. Viewers of these shows negatively evaluated the criminal justice system yet supported more punitive official policies against crime.⁸⁷ In fact, the study found that more frequent viewing of fictional crime dramas increased likelihood of their support of the death penalty

Viewers in the U.S. watch crime dramas at different rates, depending on the identity of the viewer. Researchers carried out a study of viewers in North America of crime dramas including: *Law and Order*, *NCIS*, *NCIS: Los Angeles*, *The Mentalist* and *Criminal*

⁸⁶ Dana E. Mastro and Amanda L. Robinson. "Cops and crooks: Images of minorities on primetime television." *Journal of Criminal Justice* 28, no. 5 (2000): 394.

⁸⁷ Lisa A. Kort -Butler and Kelley J. Sittner Hartshorn. "Watching the detectives: Crime programming, fear of crime, and attitudes about the criminal justice system." *The Sociological Quarterly* 52, no. 1 (2011): 48.

Minds. This study employed a uses and gratifications approach, in contrast to the “hypodermic needle” approach, for its audience analysis.⁸⁸ The study offered conclusions about differing reasons for males and females to watch crime dramas. Male viewers in the study were more likely to watch crime dramas to identify with either the police or crime victims than females, while females were more likely to watch crime dramas in order to feel less lonely and to relax and fill time. The researchers suggest additional studies to determine possible statistical significance for these findings.⁸⁹

Another finding from observing crime dramas is that police in crime dramas break laws in order to serve the public. One study focused on the representations of police officers’ procedural fairness in fictional police shows. The study found that in their sample shows, police officers were generally portrayed as procedurally fair. The study found on average one violation of trustworthy police behavior per episode. The violations in these shows were found to be based on police officers desiring to successfully perform their job duties.⁹⁰ The study examined fictional police officers in *CSI: Miami*, *NCIS*, *Without a Trace*, and *The Mentalist*. The study argues that police rule-breaking in those shows strengthens, rather than undermines, police officers’ positions as moral agents in society.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Darrin Brown, Sharon Lauricella, Aziz Douai, and Arshia Zaidi. "Consuming television crime drama: A uses and gratifications approach." *American Communication Journal* 14, no. 1 (2012): 49.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁹⁰ Astrid Dirikx, Jan Van den Bulck and Stephan Parmentier. "The police as societal moral agents: “Procedural justice” and the analysis of police fiction." *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 56, no. 1 (2012): 49.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 38

Viewers respond in complex ways to what they see in crime dramas. The ‘CSI effect’ possibly influences viewers who become jurors. The ‘CSI effect’ is a term used to describe a possible influence that watching the television show *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* has on behavior of jurors in real world trials. One suggestion is that jurors seeing forensic evidence presented on *CSI* have unrealistic standards for evidence in real trials. Some studies of the ‘CSI effect,’ however, argue the validity and existence of the effect.⁹² One view is that because of unrealistic standards, *CSI*-watching jurors then will likely acquit defendants at higher rates. Another view is that *CSI* watching influences jurors the have an increased tendency to support convictions. There has not, to date, been reproducible research supporting the existence or delineating the nature of the ‘CSI effect.’⁹³

While some research has quantified violence by officers of the law, there are particular areas which have received more thorough study than others. The stereotypical treatment of minorities has multiple studies. Researchers have detailed the moral behavior of police officers on television.⁹⁴ The possible media effects on audiences relating to legal portrayals on television have received research attention. One area that can benefit from more focused study is research to increase the visibility of the connections between violence in television with justified violence by representatives of the law.

⁹² Tom R. Tyler. "Viewing CSI and the threshold of guilt: Managing truth and justice in reality and fiction." *The Yale Law Journal* (2006): 1050.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 1050.

⁹⁴ Astrid Dirikx, Jan Van den Bulck and Stephan Parmentier. "The police as societal moral agents: "Procedural justice" and the analysis of police fiction." *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 56, no. 1 (2012): 49.

Relevance of the Literature to the Study

The preceding literature review details existing knowledge regarding studies in the representation and effects of violence in television series. Research in the field suggests a starting point for the development of a methodology for a study of coding of violence in television drama series. This literature review has identified an area which has not received coverage, specifically, the redefining of how violence by legal officials in television dramas is measured and related to justification of that violence.

This chapter has carried out a literature review of relevant research in fields of media, television, violence and police behavior. This overview gives a historical perspective on studies of media violence and discusses the research on media effects and cultivation theory. Also discussed were content analyses studies of media violence and alternate definitions of violence. This chapter also described research into portrayals of police behavior. The next chapter will lay out the methodological framework employed in this study.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY DISCUSSION

This study seeks to identify the justification of violence by officials in television crime dramas. This chapter details the research design and methodology choices taken for this research. The design and methodology decisions are intended to accomplish the acquisition of data and the analysis of the data to generate findings for two research questions and two proposed hypotheses. The study of portrayals of violence on television must contend with multiple influences on the descriptive or predictive outcomes of the research. No single study can illuminate all the varying factors potentially involved in the phenomenon under study. The following section will outline the first decisions made to focus this study on achievable goals and methods.

Research Design

This research study is quantitative and intended to generate descriptive findings. The research design developed for this study results from a combination of examples identified through the literature review process. A literature review of previous content analysis of television programming data led to limiting coding and data collection designs to be most suitable for addressing the research questions and hypotheses in this study.⁹⁵ Several sample content analysis studies reported in the *National Television Violence Study, volume 1* are used as models for the design of this research.⁹⁶ The research reported on in that collection are television-centered media effects studies employing

⁹⁵ Daniel Riffe and Stephen Lacy and Frederick Fico, *Analyzing Media Messages: Using Quantitative Content Analysis in Research*. New York, NY: Routledge 2014: 41.

⁹⁶ Margaret Seawell, *National Television Violence Study, Volume 1*. (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, Inc1997).

quantitative content analysis.

This study was designed to attain a limited goal, perform limited coverage, employ a limited sample of data sources, and expect focused outcomes. Time and resource limits constrained the choices in how this study was designed. The study analyzed a sample of 24 television episodes from the 2011 broadcast season. Two coders gathered the data from the sample shows. The three variables coded for in this study are type of violent incident, identity of perpetrator and justification. The selections made shaped the possible findings and made the study possible to achieve under the constrained research parameters. The design decisions chosen for this study generated findings responsive to the research questions and study hypotheses.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The previous chapter contains a discussion of the existing research reported in the fields of media violence, content analysis and portrayal of officials in television dramas. The present chapter explains the methods employed for this research. First, details are given for the universe and sample used in this study. Next, the content analysis measures and categorization choices are explained. Lastly, coding decisions and reliability and ethical concerns are explored. The study hypotheses and research questions derive from the intention to add to the range of results previously reported in media studies.

The research questions and hypotheses in this study cover the portrayal of police violence in television crime dramas. The first question is: *How many incidents of violence in television crime dramas are performed by officials?* The second question is: *How many incidents of violence are justified in television crime dramas?* Two

hypotheses are being researched. The first is: *The majority of incidents of violence performed by non-state actors will not be justified within television crime dramas.* The second is: *The majority of incidents of violence carried out by officials will be justified within television crime dramas.* This study tabulates the incidents of violence in sample shows and determines the answers to the research questions posed.

This study addresses the research hypotheses and questions by the methodology of quantitative content analysis. The answers to the two questions come in the form of figures and percentages. The findings relevant to the two hypotheses are figures and percentages. The hypotheses are sustained by the propositions and are supported by the numerical results. Selecting sample data from the universe under study is the first step in the generation of findings relevant to the questions and hypotheses.

Data Universe and Sample Selection

The universe of media that is relevant for this study is television crime dramas aired in the U.S. that are likely to exhibit incidents of violence and contain police officers or authorities. For the purpose of this study, television crime drama is the genre of programs having a significant amount of airtime focused on criminal activity. After a review of a wide sample of the universe of television crime drama series, a subset of eight shows were selected. The sample includes eight different program titles across eight channels in the 2011 broadcast season. This sample was chosen to test for the questions as framed in the research design. There is wide variation in the samples selected—the shows differ in plot choices, character relations, presence of police and by subplot.

The choices of sample crime dramas, the particular season, and the included

episodes were made purposively rather than through random selection. The 2011 broadcast year was determined by reference to recent broadcasts that would be 100 percent available for online streaming for the coders. The channels selected include the big three "traditional" networks and five additional channels which are available to cable subscribers in the U.S. The shows selected for the sample are popular crime-related dramas that demonstrate success in the television market with runs of at least three years apiece. Three episodes are included in the sample for each show to widen the pool for data. Choosing to select the sample non-randomly allows the study to be accomplished with the resources available. The non-probability sampling employed can offer valid results in demonstrating that particular features exist within the universe and for exploratory studies.⁹⁷

Table 1. Drama Shows Selected in Sample

Title	Channel	Years	Season	Episodes
<i>Body of Proof</i>	(ABC)	2011-2013	1	1, 5, 9
<i>Breaking Bad</i>	(AMC)	2008-2013	4	1, 7, 12
<i>Burn Notice</i>	(USA)	2007-2013	5	1, 9, 18
<i>Homeland</i>	(Showtime)	2011-2014	1	1, 7, 13
<i>Justified</i>	(FX)	2010-2014	2	1, 7, 13
<i>Law and Order: SVU</i>	(NBC)	1999-2014	12	1, 12, 24
<i>NCIS</i>	(CBS)	2003-2014	9	1, 12, 24
<i>Treme</i>	(HBO)	2010-2013	2	1, 6, 11

The research intent in the selection of the eight shows is to use programming spread across the expanded crime drama genre airing on contemporary television channels. The selected shows have an important focus on criminal activity, while being different in most other respects. The dramas selected feature fictionalize accounts of plausible,

⁹⁷ Neil J. Salkind, ed. *Encyclopedia of research design*. Vol. 1. (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 2010): 922.

real-world illegal and investigative scenarios. Criminals, drug dealers, killers, terrorists and police officers exist, and these fictional dramas present their activities in stylized form. With the exception of *Treme*, each of the shows feature narratives heavy with violent action.

The eight television dramas chosen for this study are *Body of Proof*⁹⁸, *Breaking Bad*⁹⁹, *Burn Notice*¹⁰⁰, *Homeland*¹⁰¹, *Justified*¹⁰², *Law and Order:SVU*¹⁰³, *NCIS*¹⁰⁴ and *Treme*.¹⁰⁵ Each full program, without commercials, is used from three episodes of each of these television series. Show locations, variety of character, the style of language and cultural references used in the shows also vary for each one of these series. While the cultural bound references in these shows are not used in this study, the diversity separating the shows helps broaden the coverage of the study. All eight of these shows are produced in the U.S. and were originally targeted for this audience. Table One displays the

⁹⁸ Christopher Murphey. "Pilot," *Body of Proof*, season 1, episode 1, directed by Nelson McCormick, aired March 29, 2011 (ABC).

⁹⁹ Vince Gilligan. "Box Cutter," *Breaking Bad*, season 4, episode 1, directed by Adam Bernstein, aired July 17, 2011 (AMC).

¹⁰⁰ Matt Nix. "Company Man," *Burn Notice*, season 5, episode 1, directed by Stephen Surjik, aired June 23, 2011 (USA).

¹⁰¹ Howard Gordon and Alex Gansa and Gideon Raff. "Pilot," *Homeland*, season 1, episode 1, directed by Michael Cuesta, aired October 2, 2011 (Showtime).

¹⁰² Elmore Leonard and Graham Yost. "The Moonshine War," *Justified*, season 2, episode 1, directed by Adam Arkin, aired February 9, 2011 (FX).

¹⁰³ Dawn DeNoon. "Locum," *Law and Order-SVU*, season 12, episode 1, directed by Arthur W. Forney, aired September 22, 2010 (NBC).

¹⁰⁴ Gary Glasberg. "Nature of the Beast," *NCIS*, season 9, episode 1, directed by Tony Wharmby, aired September 20, 2011 (CBS).

¹⁰⁵ Eric Overmyer and Anthony Bourdain. "Accentuate the Positive," *Treme*, season 2, episode 1, directed by Anthony Hemingway, aired April 24, 2011 (HBO).

information about the eight shows in a grid. The following paragraphs will describe the programs.

Breaking Bad is an AMC crime drama that aired from 2008 to 2013 that follows the adventures of Walter White, a struggling high school chemistry teacher engaged in a life of crime producing and selling methamphetamine. This morality play shows the embarrassment and degradation that result from drug crimes, while exploring right and wrong in all its gray complexity. The FX network series *Justified* is a critically-acclaimed series mixing the genres of western and noir. The series has aired from 2010 to the present with a lawman hero, Raylan Givens, who wears a white cowboy hat and is plagued with moral conflict and challenges in the small town of Harlan, Kentucky. *Law & Order: SVU* is a popular NBC drama show that has aired from 1999 to the present which follows a squad called the Special Victims Unit (SVU) as it investigates and prosecutes sexually-motivated offenses. *NCIS*, on the CBS network, has aired from 2003 to the present and is a television crime drama set at the Naval Criminal Investigative Service office in Washington, D.C. This show is about a team of special agents who investigate crimes involving U.S. Navy personnel using criminal investigation techniques and forensic science. The NCIS team on the show consists of the agent Jethro Gibbs and additional staff in the office.

Burn Notice on the USA network aired from 2007 to 2013 and follows stories about “burned” spy Michael Westen and a small team engaging in covert and illicit activities while avoiding jail and aiding other characters. *Homeland* is a Showtime drama series that has aired from 2011 to the present that follows the story of U.S. Marine Nicholas Brody, who had been captured and held as a prisoner by an al-Qaeda-linked terrorist

named Abu Nazir. Two other main characters in the series are Carrie Matheson, a CIA agent, and Saul Berenson, Carrie's boss at the CIA.

Treme from HBO aired from 2010 to 2013. *Treme* explores class, race, and survival in an urban American setting. This story explores stories of life in the wake of urban disaster and looks to the possibilities for human triumph and failure. The show also finds the ways that jazz music connects people. *Treme* follows several families and individuals who are multiethnic and of varied professions living in the Treme section of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina in 2005. *Body of Proof* is a medical crime drama series that ran on ABC from 2011 to 2013. This crime procedural is centered on a strong female lead and features medical examiner Dr. Megan Hunt, aided by police and medical supporting staff.

The episodes chosen for each show fit a standard pattern across the complete sample. Episodes are selected from each show in the shared season that are identified as the first episode of the season, the last episode of the season and the middle of the season. The rationale for choosing the first and last episodes of a season follows from the idea that those episodes are most important to the producers of shows for rating and audience accumulation and retention. The sample includes the middle episode of each show for even spread across the season. The standardized selection criteria followed for each of the sample shows supports matching and comparing data across the range of the sample.

The subset of shows selected from the crime drama universe of interest is a non-random sample which is appropriate for this initial investigation into quantification of justification of violence committed by officials. This section has identified the universe and sample selected for the study. The following section will explore the content analysis

methodology to be used on the sample to obtain data for this study.

Content Analysis

Content analysis is one of the most widely used methodological tools in the analysis of communication discourse, beginning with textual data analysis during the 18th century up to the current technological forms of communication such as audio and video formats. Content analysis can generate valid and reliable quantification schemes for textual data in multiple formats and contribute to shared research by different scholars, meaning past data analysis can be combined with later analysis of the same and different data.

Content analysis can be a manageable research technology to produce valid results.

Weber asserts that because of the unobtrusive measures resulting from content analysis, “There is little danger that the act of measurement itself will act as a force for change that confounds the data.”¹⁰⁶

This study employs content analysis to address the requirements of this research in order to identify incidents of justification of violence performed by officials. Coders view the sample shows and use content analysis to identify the target data. The coders use assigned coding guidelines to allocate the observed data into categories. This content analysis requires determining the unit of analysis to use with the rules for categorizing the data.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Robert Philip Weber. *Basic Content Analysis*. (Beverly Hills, California, Sage Publications 1985): 10.

¹⁰⁷ Klaus Krippendorff. *Content Analysis: An Introduction to its Methodology*. (Thousand Oaks, CA:SAGE 2012): 333.

Units of Analysis

This study looks at types and categories of violence in television crime dramas. The study performs evaluation at the show level and at the scene level. These two units of analysis are evaluated differently in order to code violence by officials. For both units of analysis, coding decisions are carried out during continuous viewing of the show. Multiple instances can be identified and coded in each show.

The show level is the highest level of analysis evaluated in this study and is evaluated to determine scenes with violence in them. A first coding of violent incidents can be made at the show level and verified at the scene level. Opening sequences are included in the analysis if they have not been aired previously (but not credits sequences.)

A scene, for purposes of the analysis, is defined as a span of continuous action and dialogue that takes place in the same location involving one group of characters. A scene may contain one violent incident or multiple ones. For example, if there were multiple violent acts as in a fight, then any individual blows will not be counted separately. If there is a break in the action, change in location, time, or characters involved, the incident after the change is considered to be a new scene.

The evaluations of the units of analysis are intended to identify and code the incidents of violence and other variables being observed. Coders have guidelines for determining how coding is to proceed during viewing of the sample programs. Categorization for the purposes of addressing the research questions and hypotheses is carried out before coding begins.

Categorization and Coding Scheme

Data gathering is organized in this study through development of a categorization scheme. Categorization schemes can be developed based on texts under analysis, or be synthetically developed by the researcher to be applied to more general texts. Examples of researcher developed categories have been popularity ratings of shows based on audience subgroups, and the gender of characters in the content of movies or television shows. This study uses a categorization scheme with coding guidelines that match the data to the categories through evaluation of the units of analysis.

During the development of the categories for this study, the appropriate coding and classification schemes were tailored to maximize the usefulness of the result from sample evaluations. Categories need to adhere to mutual exclusivity and need to provided the required data. This content analysis of 24 crime drama shows is able to represent the prevalence of violence over the networks in a way that permits the accurate and meaningful aggregation and analysis of the data. This study uses structured categorical schemes to allocate the data viewed in the television dramas. The categories required for coding in order to answer the research questions are the identity of perpetrators and victims of violence and whether the violence is justified or not.

Instances of violence, as identified in television shows for this study, are defined as actions causing or designed to cause harm to individuals, either physically or psychologically, including implicit threats, nonverbal behavior, and outbursts of anger. Antisocial activities with aggressive intent, such as deceit and hostility when including elements of threat are included in this analysis. This definition is derived from combining those used by Gerbner and other media researchers with the one reported by Anu Mustonen

and Lea Pulkkinen.¹⁰⁸

Justification of violence is present when the violence is considered to be acceptable, such that the perpetrator should not be punished. Examples of justified violence are self-defense, preemptive action to save others, legally authorized action and actions that stem from good intentions. In this study the difference between justifiable actions and forgivable actions will be disregarded. For the purpose of this study justification will be recognized when there is at least one character in the program, in addition to the perpetrator, who believes the violence was justified.

The design of a coding scheme is important in order to generate usable results from content analyses. Coding schemes employed in other studies were reviewed and judged to be unsuitable for the current study. While much work has been done with Gerbner's violence index and FCC regulatory classification symbols, they did not address the units of analysis focused on in this study. This study employs a coding scheme that derives from that of Mustonen and Pulkkinen.¹⁰⁹ The scheme of coding is detailed in Table 2.

The categories chosen are: perpetrator and victim, types of violence, and justified. The subcategories for perpetrator and victim include: officer or not officer. The subcategories for type of violence are: involving violent physical contact to a person, involving death of a person, involving violent verbal interaction, involving threat or intimidation, involving accidental injury or violence, preparation for violence, danger of conflict or

¹⁰⁸ Anu Mustonen and Lea Pulkkinen. "Television violence: A development of a coding scheme." *Journal Of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 41, no. 2 (1997): 168.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

violence, result of violence, brandishing of a weapon, and attempted violence. Another category is a yes or no code which represents if the violence is portrayed as justified or not.

Coding is guided by one set of shared coding instructions. The coding instructions list and describe the categories of violence, perpetrator/victim identity and justification. Perpetrators and victims are identified if the show character is portrayed as having official capacity. Justification is coded based on the violent incident appearing to at least one character, other than the perpetrator, as sanctioned or justified. One code sheet is used for each show.

Table 2. Television Violence Coding

Violence Type Coding:

Perpetrator and Victim Coding:

Code	Description	Code	Description
AIP	Involves violent physical contact	PO	Perpetrator is officer
ADP	Involving death of a person	PN	Perpetrator is not officer
ASP	Involves violent verbal interaction	PU	Perpetrator is unknown
AIT	Involves threat or intimidation	VO	Victim is officer
AIV	Involves accidental injury or violence	VN	Victim is not officer
APP	Preparation for violence	VU	Victim is not known
AID	Danger of conflict or violence		
ARV	Result of violence		Justified:
ABW	Brandishing of weapon	yes	Violent incident is justified
ATV	Attempted violence	no	Violent incident is not justified

Coders viewed the sample shows and carried out data collection then analysis followed with the coded and gathered data. All the shows were watched in recorded or streaming format which allowed back and forth viewing in order to double-check for coding and to review the scenes when needed. Since these shows are identified and available

as the data source, this research can easily be replicated. Table 2 contains the coding assignments and descriptions, while the last category is 0 or 1 for the absence or presence of justification for the violence.

Two coders examined all programs included in the study. When findings did not agree, the coders consulted on the differences, usually reviewing the scene containing violent content to resolve issues. Since most incidents of violence seemed designed to grab the viewer's attention the need for arbitration was minimal. The coders analyzed the sample of 24 programs for a total viewing time of 18 hours, plus replays, freezing and re-views.

Validity of Study

Validity depends on multiple factors including whether the units of analysis selected for the study and the categorization schemes developed for the analysis accurately measure the phenomena being studied. The process of conceptual refinement of the categorization scheme using review of theory or belief about the study framework is important for valid studies. There are five types of validity to take into account when doing content analysis. Weber outlines them as face, construct, hypothesis, predictive, and semantic validity.¹¹⁰ Face validity involves labeling and relies on a single variable being measured on face value. Face validity can be a weak form of validation because creating categories to code data is vulnerable to personal bias. Care was taken in constructing categories and coding in order to address the face validity issue in this study.

Construct validity assesses the cohesiveness and congruency of variables or

¹¹⁰ Robert Philip Weber. *Basic Content Analysis*. (Beverly Hills, CA Sage 1985): 18-20.

categories in the constructs used for the analysis. A content analysis of incidents of violence in media needs to count, describe and analyze the nature of incidents in stories. This study addressed construct validity by attending to definitions of violence, justification, scene and programs.

Hypothesis validity depends on the agreement between variables and the correspondence with theory and study framework. This study only has the theoretical grounding of the meaning of violence, justification, television scenes and programs.

Predictive validity concerns forecasts about correspondence between study results and external events or conditions. This study makes no predictions about empirical events outside of the study samples, except that the behavior of the data universe will correspond to the findings of the sample.

Semantic validity refers to the need for words and other coding units classified together to possess similar connotations for the classification to have validity. Semantic validity exists when agreement can be reached on shared meaning of terms and concepts. Semantic validity is ensured by stating the terms and definitions for this study.

The validity of this study is high based on processes built into the study to reduce error and bias. Challenges to validity in this study derive from the fact that the samples used are not selected randomly. In this study, the scenes are chosen based on a selection of episodes and viewing of those episodes. If others replicate this research, they might decide to use different scenes. This research has validity of data, since the television shows are constant and will not change based on actions of researchers.

Ethical Discussion

This research is mostly free of ethical concerns since there are no human subjects

involved. There is however the possibility of bias in sampling and coding when gathering data. This study uses a modified definition of violence, which can reflect how results are interpreted.

This study does not have significant potential for causing harm, using ethical principles based on the four areas mentioned by Bryman.¹¹¹ The first principle involving harm to participants is not an issue for this study, as the participants are fictional characters in television dramas. There is no ethical difficulty regarding areas of lack of consent, invasion of privacy or deception.¹¹²

Methodology Summary

The methodology employed in this study has been detailed and has covered issues of categorization, coding, identification of the universe and sample selection. Approaches to validity and ethics have been discussed. After coding, an analysis is performed on gathered data. Several separate analyses are employed to answer the research questions asked and to test the hypotheses posed. The results and analysis of the data are reported in the next chapter.

¹¹¹ Bryman, Alan. *Social Research Methods, 2nd edition*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2004): 118.

¹¹² Ibid.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter is organized into four sections: an introduction to the plan of analysis; a description of the study's general findings; an examination of the study's specific findings as related to the questions it set out to answer, and the hypotheses it set out to test; and a discussion of the findings. The chapter concludes with a summary of the findings.

The results of this study should be understood through the lens of different units of analysis. For example, some findings presented here use the featured shows as the unit of analysis, and counts of violence are coded at the show level so results of this variable can be used to compare violent incidents among different shows. All other findings pertain to violent interactions as the unit of analysis. The number of official violent actors and acts of justified violence are both coded at the interaction level. Each finding in this study should be understood in terms of its proper unit of analysis, that is, show, scene, and interaction.

Plan of Analysis

In this chapter the analysis focuses on three concerns: the identification of violence, the identification of official violence, and the identification of justified violence. The identification of these variables within the units of analysis generates results about counts of violence in the genre of television programs under study. The study findings indicate counts of violence, official violence and justified violence.

This study carried out data collection, coding and analysis to generate counts of types of violence in fictional crime dramas on television. The analytical scheme em-

ployed was based on previous analysis carried out by Gerbner and other television violence scholars.¹¹³ New categories were added to the scheme employed by Gerbner to enable the study of violence committed by police and officials. Categories of justification and violence by police were added with appropriate coding rules. This study asserts that justification and police violence are independent elements of television violence that can enable new analytic results. The next section describes findings of a general nature, while a following section reports the findings most closely relevant to the research questions of the study.

Findings on Violence in Television Crime Dramas

Twenty-four episodes were analyzed from eight television shows that air on different networks: *Body of Proof* (ABC), *Breaking Bad* (AMC), *Burn Notice* (USA), *Homeland* (Showtime), *Justified* (FX), *Law and Order:SVU* (NBC), *NCIS* (CBS) and *Treme* (HBO). Four of the shows can be categorized as crime dramas: *Breaking Bad*, *Justified*, *Law and Order:SVU* and *NCIS*. *Homeland* and *Burn Notice* are mystery dramas, while *Treme* is an urban situational drama and *Body of Proof* is a medical procedural drama.

Coding was conducted by examining each show and following simple rules to categorize the incidents of violence. Each episode resulted in coding for characters and incidents of violence. Characters are either classed as acting in an official capacity or not. Violence is coded by different categories of types of violence. The types of violence are

¹¹³ George Gerbner, Larry Gross, Michael Morgan, and Nancy Signorielli. "The "mainstreaming" of America: Violence profile no. 11." *Journal of communication* 30, no. 3 (1980): 10.

not used in this analysis, but are available for comparison in other studies. Following the example of Gerbner, a character's intention to harm is not a requisite for the coding of violence. Violence was determined by observable acts, or by acts that are described in the episode.

The data outcomes relating to violence were consistent with differences in the genre of the shows. While all of the shows had significant counts of violence, the presence of police violence varied by show. There was a total of 193 incidents of violence in the sample shows. *Body of Proof* and *Treme* had the lowest total counts of violent incidents. Of the total incidents, 52 were assigned to police or other authorized individuals, while the remaining 141 incidents were assigned to individuals with no official affiliation. The crime dramas had similar counts of official violence, with the exception of *Breaking Bad*, which had zero such incidents in the sample episodes.

The total counts of violence in the individual shows and overall is consistent with previous studies. The shows averaged 8.1 incidents of violence per episode, with a low of three incidents, in an episode of *Treme*, and a high of 14 incidents, in an episode of *NCIS*. The shows were fairly consistent in the number of violent incidents they portrayed. The change in violent incidents per episode in individual shows was very stable. Most shows in the sample had almost the same count of incidents of violence in each of the three reviewed episodes of the show. The spread of the count of incidents in three shows was 1 or 2, while only two shows, *NCIS* and *Treme* had a spread of more than 5 incidents.

Assigning responsibility for violence to particular characters is somewhat subjective. Consistency in counting violence in these shows and assigning character responsibility was a challenge. The responsibility for violent incidents required judgment because of

the entanglement of multiple individuals in violent incidents. Sometimes acts of violence seemed to go in two directions at once, with multiple individuals appearing as both perpetrators and victims. Violent incidents involving police or other official actors were especially subject to this complexity. Often, when police violence is employed, it is justified as defensive action or reaction to violence from the victim in the interaction. The choice made in coding violence was to assign it to the official actor when there were multiple violent actors, and the official actor was not a victim.

Findings on Research Questions

The portrayal of violence by police or other officials was consistent among most shows. Two shows, *Body of Proof* and *Breaking Bad*, did not have any police violence across their sample episodes. The incidents of police violence totaled 52 with a low of zero in an episode of *Burn Notice* and high of 10 in an episode of *NCIS*. The percentage of incidents of violence by officials in the sample episodes was 26.9 percent. The highest percentage of violence being performed by official actors was in *NCIS* while *Body of Proof* and *Breaking Bad* had no portrayals in the sample episodes.

Assigning violence to police and official individuals is done in the cases of individuals claiming to be acting in an official capacity. This study's title describes the behavior of some characters in these shows, when they are not police, but claim to be acting for the government or in some official capacity. Some characters in these drama shows are acting under color of authority when performing violent acts.

In *Burn Notice*, central characters often represent themselves as acting for the United States government or some police agency. Some of these cases seem legitimate, in

that the individuals appear to have received orders from U.S. government officials in Washington, D.C., or within their locality. In other cases, the characters in *Burn Notice* are clearly false in claiming to represent official authority while not having legitimate authority. In all of these cases, the coding is for these incidents to be assigned to official actors.

In *Homeland*, many characters in the series work for the CIA, FBI or other government agencies. Also, some characters in the series are U.S. soldiers operating in their official capacity. Sometimes, it is not clear if characters are acting in their official capacity or as private individuals. As with incidents in the real world that occur in response to the war on terror, there are questions of when legal lines are crossed. For the purposes of coding in this study all incidents by individuals with official affiliations are assumed to take place as official actors.

Justified and *Law and Order:SVU* have characters who have official police positions, but who also take the law into their own hands and act in a vigilante manner on occasion. Because these characters have official authority, their actions are sometimes in a legal grey area. The writing and plotting of the shows portray almost all of their incorrect use of force as justified. All incidents of violence performed by police officers in these two shows are coded as carried out by official actors.

The research questions and hypothesis in this study can be answered with simple calculations. Question one asks for the count of incidents of violence attributable to official actors; question two asks for the count of incidents of violence that can be construed as justified. The first hypothesis of this study is that *the majority of incidents of violence performed by non-state actors will not be justified within television crime dramas*; the

second hypothesis of this study is that *the majority of incidents of violence carried out by officials will be justified within television crime dramas*. To answer the research hypotheses requires computing the percentage of the incidents of violence performed under the color of authority that are justified in the fictional episodes.

The total count of violence in the sample was 193 incidents over the 24 episodes, which averages to 8.1 incidents of violence per episode. Gerbner-style research has found 5.4 acts of violence per hour on television.¹¹⁴ Another study found 9.7 violent acts per hour on U.S. television programming.¹¹⁵

The vast majority of incidents that occur linked to authority are justified. Only 4 of the total of 52 incidents are coded as not justified. The percentage of violent incidents under color of authority that are justified is 92.3 %. Non-official violence is only justified in 21 cases out of 141 incidents, which is a percentage of 14.9 %.

The “Combined Justified Violence” table (Table 3) depicts a combined total of the eight sample shows. The table represents the incidents of violence in each show (Violence), the count of incidents that are performed by official actors (Off), the count of incidents that are performed by non-official actors (Non), the number of incidents by official actors that are justified (Just-O), and the number of incidents that are not by official actors but are justified (Just-N). Also listed is the percentage of violent incidents by official

¹¹⁴ Nancy Signorielli, “Television’s mean and dangerous world: A continuation of the cultural indicators perspective,” in *Cultivation analysis: New directions in media effects research*, eds. Nancy Signorielli and Michael Morgan (Newbury Park, CA: Sage 1990): 85.

¹¹⁵ In “NCTV says violence on TV up 16%,” *Broadcasting Magazine*, (1983, Mar 22): 63. Quoted in W. James Potter and William Ware. “An Analysis of the Contexts of Antisocial Acts on Prime-Time Television.” *Communication Research*. 14, no. 6 (1987): 665.

actors that are justified (Official %), and the percentage of violent incidents by non-official actors (Non %).

Table 3. Combined Justified Violence

Show	Violence	Off	Non	Just-O	Just-N	Official %	Non %
<i>Body of Proof</i>	16	0	16	0	0	NA	NA
<i>Breaking Bad</i>	25	0	25	0	1	NA	4.0 %
<i>Burn Notice</i>	25	7	18	7	13	100.0 %	72.0 %
<i>Homeland</i>	29	8	21	7	1	87.5 %	4.8 %
<i>Justified</i>	26	8	18	8	2	100.0 %	11.1 %
<i>Law and O: SVU</i>	25	7	18	7	2	100.0 %	8.6 %
<i>NCIS</i>	28	15	13	14	1	96.4 %	7.7 %
<i>Treme</i>	19	7	12	5	1	71.4 %	8.3 %
Total	193	52	141	48	21	92.3 %	14.9 %

Tables 4 through 11 are individual details of the eight shows in the sample. The tables represent the incidents of violence in each episode (Inc), the count of incidents that are performed by official actors (Off), the number of incidents by official actors that are justified (Just-O), and the number of incidents that are not by official actors but are justified (Just-N). The 24 episodes in the sample are detailed in the tables.

Table 4. *Body of Proof* Violence Coding

Episode	Inc	Off	Just-O	Just-N
1 x 1	6	0	0	0
1 x 5	5	0	0	0
1 x 9	5	0	0	0

Table 5. *Breaking Bad* Violence Coding

Episode	Inc	Off	Just-O	Just-N
4 x 1	6	0	0	0
4 x 5	8	0	0	0
4 x 12	11	0	0	1

Table 6. *Burn Notice* Violence Coding

Episode	Inc	Off	Just-O	Just-N
5 x 1	8	4	4	1
5 x 9	8	0	0	7
5 x 18	9	3	3	5

Table 7. *Homeland* Violence Coding

Episode	Inc	Off	Just-O	Just-N
1 x 1	12	5	4	1
1 x 7	9	2	2	0
1 x 13	8	1	1	0

Table 8. *Justified Violence Coding*

Episode	Inc	Off	Just-O	Just-N
2 x 1	11	3	3	2
2 x 7	8	3	3	0
2 x 13	7	2	2	0

Table 9. *Law & Order: SVU Violence Coding*

Episode	Inc	Off	Just-O	Just-N
12 x 1	7	1	1	0
12 x 12	9	2	2	2
12 x 24	9	4	4	0

Table 10. *NCIS Violence Coding*

Episode	Inc	Off	Just-O	Just-N
9 x 1	14	10	10	0
9 x 12	12	4	3	0
5 x 24	6	1	1	1

Table 11. *Treme Violence Coding*

Episode	Inc	Off	Just-O	Just-N
2 x 1	5	0	0	0
2 x 6	3	2	2	0
2 x 11	11	5	3	1

Discussion and Summary

The findings in this study focused on justification of official violence in crime dramas are significant and raise numerous questions. The justification of violence by officials is extremely high in the sample shows, although two of the shows had no violence by officials across their three episode samples. Officials were usually justified in their actions even when they acted without authority during the violent incidents. Do certain sub-genres within crime dramas contain less or more violence and less or more justification of violence? Some shows have wide differences in incidents of violence from episode to episode, while most shows were consistent across episodes. Lastly, there may be correlations between how violence by officials is portrayed in crime dramas and conditions in contemporary society.

The observation of 92.3 percent of violent acts committed by officials being justified requires discussion. The coding of individuals as official when they act with authority and when they do not certainly impacts the results in this study. Perhaps the producers

of some crime dramas wish to impart clear moral messages to viewers and those shows may sometimes serve a role of setting clear dichotomies between evil doers and heroes for the audience. One question that is beyond the scope of this study to answer is to what extent the justification of violence by officials reflects societal conditions.

The research design employed in this study is not adequate to unpack how different contextual factors in the shows are entangled with the justification of violence by officials. The categorization and coding employed in the study did not separate out the contexts when violent incidents occurred. During some incidents officials were acting under authority; some incidents of violence were coded when a character was authorized to use force at certain times in the show, but their actions at the time of the violent incident was likely not authorized; and still some characters who have no authorized role to use violence pretended to be officials during the commission of violent acts. Future studies should include coding categories to account for different auspices under which potential state actors commit violent acts.

Some entertainment dramas serve audiences as reinforcement of moral viewpoints. Audiences often like to cheer the hero and boo the villain and thus the high level of justification of violence by officials may reflect the hero versus villain role of some crime dramas. The identification of conditions that justify violence has been subject to long contentious argumentation in the fields of philosophy and legal scholarship.¹¹⁶ Television shows often follow working rules used to judge moral decisions about violence. Therefore, the entertainment value of crime drama shows may support the justification of violence by officials.

¹¹⁶ Reitan, Eric. "The Moral Justification of Violence." *Social theory and practice* 28, no. 3 (2002): 445-464.

An unexpected finding in this study is the fact that many incidents that appeared to the coders to be officials acting without authority or non-state actors pretending to be officials were justified when acting violently. It is not clear if this finding results from intentional production decisions in the crime dramas, influence from coding decisions or is a reflection of contemporary social values. I suspect there is societal attitudes toward law enforcement and the justice system impacts choices made by television programmers. Additional studies might separate the different and possible explanatory factors for the justification of violence by non-state actors.

Body of Proof and *Breaking Bad* had no violence coded with state actors. The two shows had incidents of violence in amounts comparable to the other six shows in the study sample. One possible explanation for the missing violence by officials could be narrative choices made in those shows. Possibly both shows chose to focus attention on the main character and to prevent positive attention to alternate characters. Violent arrests or other action-filled sequences by law enforcement personnel might take focus away from the main character in the show. The main character in *Body of Proof* is a medical examiner who does not carry a gun or handcuffs; the main character in *Breaking Bad* is a criminal drug dealer—violent or heroic arrests would detract from the main characters in both shows.

The show *Body of Proof* filmed one episode near my house in Altadena in 2013. The experience was interesting for the background insight into day-to-day filming activities of a crime drama television show. One staff person on the show mentioned to me that the actress who played the main role was very vain and did not permit any other character to get more attention than her in her shared scenes. As one anecdotal incident,

perhaps this points to directions for inquiry into why some crime dramas have limited incidents of violence by officials.

A direction for future study is the extent to which incidents of violence vary between subgenres of crime dramas. *Body of Proof* and *Treme* had the lowest total counts of violence while *Homeland* and *NCIS* had the highest overall counts. Each of the four shows can be classified in different subgenres from the others. This study does not provide any explanation for the variation between the different subgenres. Future studies might pursue code choices to bring more clarification to this question.

In summary, this chapter has provided the findings of this study in the form of quantitative results. The hypothesis of the study was sustained by a finding that incidents of violence performed by police or other official actors were justified in 92.3 percent of all cases in the sample. This analysis of the nature of television violence focused on identifying counts of police violence and justification. The counts of overall violence are consistent with previous studies.

This study took steps to change the nature of studies of media violence as related to fictional television violence. This study reports on an extended coding scheme for documenting televised violence and content analyses to contribute to research about representations of official violence. In the data sample a consistent message of justification of almost all official violence was conveyed.

There are methodological limitations in this study that must be accounted for in future research. While the sample was limited to specific types of television dramas, there was wide variance in the results. Future studies employing random sampling and an increased number of samples would enable generalization of results to the universe of

crime drama programs. In future studies, a wider sample of episodes and shows should be examined to verify the findings. A differing approach could alternatively limit studies to specific shows or specific genres of television dramas. The findings in this study seem to point to different results depending on genre and other specifics of the individual shows.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS

Overview

Violence is an area of concern in media representations and in society at large. With the large quantity of crime-related programming on television today, it is expected that scholars should seek to increase our knowledge and understanding of the factors involved in this form of entertainment programming. This study's focus on the justification of official violence has contributed to the effort to increase knowledge in the study of crime programming.

This study is exploratory rather than explanatory in nature due in part to the fact that the question of justification of violence in fictional entertainment remains mostly unexplored. Little research can be found directly relating to the research hypothesis, while there exists a vast number of articles and research on the related fields of media effects and television violence research. This chapter presents an overview of the study, summarizes the findings and discusses some implications of the findings for future research in this area. The chapter concludes by highlighting key elements and making final points.

This study surveys 24 episodes of television dramas telecast on ABC, AMC, CBS, FX, HBO, NBC, Showtime and USA with a finding that 17 of the shows surveyed, or 70.8 percent, contained police or official violence. There is little comparison to previous studies because of the lack of attention paid to official violence in television dramas. The study by Dominick to examine police in mainstream television scrutinized 330 shows, finding officer violence content in 2.9 percent of them. However, that study did not analyze the justification of violence.

This study confirms findings from previous studies while adding new information.

The observation that 100 percent of all television dramas examined in this study contained violence is consistent with previous studies, while the percentage that showed official violence offers new information. While the study began with expectations for justification of official violence, the results show high correspondence between incidents of official violence and justification of that violence. The research questions and hypothesis in this study are well suited to the research methodology employed.

The intention of this study is to determine how often violence of officials is justified when portrayed on television crime dramas. Research question one asks: *How many incidents of violence by officials are portrayed in television crime dramas?* The findings are that the total count of violence in the samples was 193 incidents over the 24 episodes, which averaged to 8.1 incidents of violence per show. Of the 193 incidents, 52 incidents were instigated by an official.

Research question two asks: *How many incidents of violence that are carried out are justified?* The percentage of violent incidents under color of authority that are justified is 92.3 %. Non-official violence is justified in 21 out of 141 incidents, which is a percentage of 14.9 %. The vast majority of incidents that occur linked to authority are justified. Only four of the total of 52 incidents of official violence are coded as not justified. These counts of official violence include violence that is committed by people whose actions are not authorized at the time the violence is occurring.

The hypotheses developed for this study are strongly supported by the findings. Hypothesis one predicts that the majority of incidents of violence carried out by non-authorized individuals will not be justified within television crime dramas. While violence is more likely to be carried out by non-authorized individuals, most of those incidents are

not shown as justified on crime dramas. This prediction was borne out by the results that showed only 14.9 percent of violence was likely to appear to be justified. The study results are expected and support the hypothesis.

Hypothesis two predicts that the majority of incidents of violence carried out by officials on television crime dramas will be justified. This prediction was borne out by the results that show authorized violence was 92.3 percent likely to appear to be justified violence. The study results are expected and support the hypothesis. The results of this study are not greatly surprising with the exception of the clear-cut justification of violence when performed by authorities. This overwhelming statistic supports a claim that television producers presents support for a "free-reign" behavior for public officials in current society. The idea is consistent with the media effects conception that television watching can affect opinions about police.¹¹⁷

Questions Raised

Contemporary U.S. society seems continually connecting with aspects of violence through all channels of communication: the news is full of violence, political discussions dwell on threats of violence, entertainment television has large segments of programming devoted to violence, and even budget negotiations at the federal, state and local level devote time to how much violence the state should pay to be prepared to counter. How crime drama television handles the justification of official violence is a window into society's elephant in the room of the existence of unofficial and official violence.

The findings in this study raise questions about portrayals of justified violence in

¹¹⁷ Gabriel Weimann, *Communicating Unreality* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2000): 116.

crime dramas and how media producers present justified violence. The data shows that producers of crime dramas represent virtually all official violence, even violence that is committed by people pretending to have authority, as justified. That observation seems to imply that even improper behavior is acceptable if the perpetrator is sometimes authorized to use force.

This study raises questions regarding the entanglement of contemporary society and media. As almost all violence by officials in the study is justified, and almost all violence by non-officials is not justified, is there a hypothesis to be made about how individuals make decisions? A future question to be asked is how many important decisions, like the justification of violence, are based on reference to the identity of the persons involved.

The justification of violence, when shown as employed by authorized individuals, raises questions about historical changes in production choices. If this study had been implemented in the 1960s, would the findings be different? Have different eras in U.S. history been subject to different attitudes toward action by officials? Likely fears of terrorism and the increased state security post 9/11 in the United States has changed the acceptance of violence performed by the authorities.

Individuals make decisions about whom to trust in areas of their lives. If individuals go through a similar process with characters on television, then it could explain the observation that officials are shown to be forgiven even when acting incorrectly. Producers may be demonstrating judgments about and acceptance of behavior by officials because of implied trust in the official's good intentions. Producers of crime dramas set the context in shows where sequences of violence occur, which may support making

decisions, about justification, based on context beyond merely official identity.

Justification of violence depends on context, identity of actors and how the actions is shown. There are questions about the mental tradeoffs producers make when deciding about justification of violence, and it is important to know how much weight is given to each factor. Producers are giving clues about justification for violence based on a complex calculus and it is not clear which factor, if any, is more dominate in the factors displayed.

Television may be useful as a tool for grappling with questions of authority, violence and justification, and it offers interesting lessons for society when these questions are considered. In contemporary society individuals must consider questions about who has authority, how they get that authority, and when that authority is active. Coming to agreement about whether violence is justified has been important for all of recorded history. One implication of studies like this one could be a decision to use television to study society and debate societal questions.

Implications

The justification of police violence in television dramas has implications for television research and communication research in general. One question raised in the previous section was the issue of learning societal lessons from television dramas. This section offers discussion of implications from this research for studies of crime dramas and possible wider applications. Wider contextual framing is likely needed to improve the analysis of television content. The research categories employed in this study were devised in broadly conceived ways to enable a preliminary look at the aspect of justification

of police violence in current crime dramas. Research with a slightly different focus could better ascertain the underlying process involved in justification of official violence, and to understand in what ways the stories and action, in those dramas, represent statements about society. This study does not support or challenge media effects theories.

Audiences choose to watch these dramas in large numbers and over many years, suggesting that the appeal of these crime dramas is connected to their entertainment value and the fulfillment of viewers' needs.¹¹⁸ Producers are offering these shows with patterns in television genres with audience appeal. The data sample used in the present study was selected from a pool of successful, currently running programming.

The results of this study may guide studies of the wider universe of commercially successful crime dramas airing currently. The success of the sample shows implies that producers are employing successful formulas for those shows, and that the content of the analyzed programs may be different from less successful shows. The stories contained in these successful crime dramas may mirror producers' choices about portraying views of the wider society, and the implication of the data findings from the sample shows may relate to the larger universe of shows.

This study does not collect data on audiences, and implications for viewers and audiences are outside of its scope. It is likely that production decisions about crime dramas have changed over time. One implication of the study is that standards of judging crime dramas are likely dependent upon contextual issues related to society-at-large. A different time implies a different group of producers, and the observations about justification of official violence would likely change.

¹¹⁸ The narrative complexity of fiction television has increased in recent years as stations compete for audience, see Jason Mittell, "Previously On: Prime Time Serials and the Mechanics of Memory." *Intermediality and Storytelling* 24 (2010): 81.

Television portrayals of police violence are multifaceted and open for varied understanding. The observed police violence might involve actions against innocent citizens, institutional violence, misrepresentation, sex-related violence, drug-related violence, alcohol-related violence, or romantically-motivated and economically-motivated violence. This study quantified some details in official violence in crime dramas, but other details are still open to be researched. One implication of this study follows from the uncovering of a significant area of research after reviewing the range of sample data.

This study might be used by researchers to investigate ideas of reflection. The significance of this study's results derives from the lack of previous research into justification of official violence. When scholars choose to conceive of media products as reflections of society, they are able to employ those products to analyze larger social issues.¹¹⁹ How the stories on crime dramas relate to society will take further study, although it appears that these stories may represent ideas held by producers of television shows. The portrayals in crime dramas may represent society as it is, or may more accurately represent hoped for or feared versions of reality. It is not clear if these fictional stories have any impact on creating the represented worlds but this study implies that the question might be answered with future research.

This study most strongly offers understanding about the objects under investigation, the justification of official violence within television programming. The attention of this study is crime dramas aired in the U.S. in the 2011 season. The findings obtained from observing the data sample tells about the nature of crime drama entertainment: there

¹¹⁹ Connie L. McNeely, "Perceptions of the criminal justice system: Television Imagery and Public Knowledge in the United States." *Journal of Criminal Justice and Popular Culture* 3, no. 1 (1995): 4.

is a high content of violence, most violence is not done by authority figures and most violence carried out by authorized figures is justified. This study makes a significant contribution because the findings and analysis of the justification of official violence have not been previously researched. This study has implications for future research into evaluations of justification of official violence in television dramas. The next section will offer some specific suggestions for future research in this field.

Future Research Recommendations

Official violence in television dramas is a fertile field for continued research. To date, research efforts have not been extensive enough to give this subject reproducible results and offer perspective for comparative analyses. Future researchers should carry out long-term studies that are highly comprehensive in evaluating programming across multiple channels. With the exception of a few distantly related studies that incidentally included counts of official violence, there are no long-term evaluations of official violence in television dramas for reference. Studies are needed to provide benchmarks for further research and comparison that extend over durations of multiple broadcast seasons.

Future studies might attempt to range further across the variety of network and alternative channels. The literature review uncovered few studies investigating violence by officials and evaluating dramatic programming beyond the conventional network structure. One interesting potential follow up would seek to discover significant differences in results across the more than 100 channels which could be evaluated for violent content. Traditional networks and channels may offer much of the same content, which might limit the scope of official violence portrayed in their drama shows.

Studies of official violence could be improved with a specific coding instrument that is more tailored to the research needs. A modified version of the coding scheme developed by Mustonen and Pulkkinen worked for this study, but in some cases the variables and categories coded for did not pertain to the needed data. Studies that are attending to the specific types of violence, such as official violence, require a more focused instrument given the specific data that is required.

This study sought to determine the amounts of justified official violence in television dramas. Based on the results of this study, dramatic television programming contains a significant quantity of incidents of justified official violence. While these findings are not entirely surprising, the study can lead to increased awareness and scholarly attention to the important field of study. This study points to the idea that television media serves a role of exposing societal norms around official violence. The justification of official violence is extensive in fictional television portrayals and may represent contemporary attitudes toward official violence.

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